



FISCAL
YEAR **2021**
ANNUAL REPORT

Celebrating People
www.denver.va.gov

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Eastern Colorado Health Care System

Profile

VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (VA ECHCS) is a Joint Commission accredited, complexity level 1A facility, covering more than 44,000 square miles. The tertiary campus, Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center, is located in Aurora, Colorado. The health care system has outpatient clinics throughout Eastern Colorado: Alamosa, Aurora, Golden, Colorado Springs, Pueblo, La Junta, and Lamar. There are Primary Care Telehealth Outreach Clinics in Burlington and Salida and a 40-bed community living center in Pueblo, Colorado. Additional free-standing healthcare sites include the Jewell Polytrauma and Low Vision Clinic, the Homeless at Valor Point and the Community Resource and Reference Center (CRRC). VA ECHCS incorporates a Geriatric Research and Education Service, Mental Illness Research Education Clinical Center of Excellence, and a Center for Innovation for Veteran-Centered and Value-Driven Care. VA ECHCS has a strong academic affiliation with the University of Colorado, supporting more than 1,300 medical students, residents and allied health professionals. VA ECHCS currently has approximately 4,000 employees.

Eastern Colorado Health Care System

1700 North Wheeling Street, Aurora, CO 80045

303-399-8020 | www.denver.va.gov



@VAECHCS



@VAECHCS



@VAECHCS



Executive Leadership



Michael T. Kilmer
Director



Clifford L. Parmley
Chief of Staff



Sean DeVeau
Nurse Executive



Thomas Talamante
Associate Director



Mary S. Newell
Assistant Director,
Longs Peak



David Yarbrough
Assistant Director,
Pikes Peak

Sites of Care

Alamosa VA Clinic

622 Del Sol Drive
Alamosa, CO 81101
719-587-6800

Aurora VA Clinic

13701 East Mississippi Avenue,
Suite 200
Aurora, CO 80012
303-398-6340

Burlington VA Clinic

1177 Rose Avenue
Burlington, CO 80807
719-346-5239

Golden VA Clinic

1020 Johnson Road
Golden, CO 80401
303-914-2680

Jewell VA Clinic

14400 East Jewell Avenue
Aurora, CO 80012
303-283-5400

La Junta VA Clinic

100 Carson Avenue, Suite 104
La Junta, CO 81050
719-383-5195

Lamar VA Clinic

1401 South Main Street, Suite B
Lamar, CO 81052
719-336-0315

PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom VA Clinic

3141 Centennial Boulevard
Colorado Springs, CO 80907
719-327-5660

PFC James Dunn VA Clinic

4776 Eagleridge Circle
Pueblo, CO 81008
719-553-1000

Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center

1700 North Wheeling Street
Aurora, CO 80045
303-399-8020

Salida VA Clinic

920 Rush Drive
Salida, CO 81201
719-539-8666

Union Boulevard VA Clinic

3920 North Union Boulevard,
Premier Health Plaza, Suite 200
Colorado Springs, CO 80907
719-327-5660



Message from the Director

Michael Kilmer

Director, VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System

One thing that I am most proud of at the VA ECHCS is the team of dedicated staff that I get to lead.

The biggest asset that ECHCS has is our people. Our committed staff, volunteers, community partners, and Veteran patients are what kept ECHCS going strong through the pandemic, a time that was especially difficult for healthcare systems. Despite the challenges, our team persevered and continued to provide quality care, innovate, and connect with Veterans.

We take this opportunity to celebrate the people that make ECHCS great. In fiscal year 2021 staff implemented mass vaccination efforts to ensure broad access for Veterans, and worked through the COVID 19 Delta variant surge to ensure Veterans received the care they needed. Volunteers connected with isolated Veterans and provided comfort to the Veterans at Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center. Community partners provided meals for staff to help fuel them through the long days. Truly, these exceptional people are the heart of our work and make this a great health care system.

As we head into 2022, we are beginning to look at our work beyond the COVID 19 pandemic. Our staff remains dedicated to providing the highest level of care and the best possible experience for our Veterans. We are deeply appreciative of our volunteers and community partners who help us make this a reality and help us reach Veterans who need our services.

Thank you for your service to our country and thank you for choosing the VA ECHCS.



2021 Financial Report & Statistics



OPERATING EXPENSES

\$462,008,240 Personnel
\$73,310,156 Services
\$119,574,774 Supplies
\$11,335,776 Equipment
\$50,890,627 Other Expenses



COMMUNITY CARE BUDGET

\$235,754,459



EDUCATION STATISTICS

1,247 Medical Residents and Students
55 Other Clinical Trainees
1,302 Total Education



RESEARCH STATISTICS

179 Principal Investigators
461 Research Projects
\$22,703,568 Total Research Funded



VOLUNTEER STATISTICS

387 Total Volunteers
43,563 Volunteer Hours
\$1,653,089.20 Donations cash and non-cash
\$2,896,391 Total impact, value of hours worked plus donated



WORKLOAD STATISTICS

(various types of beds)

58 Internal Medicine
30 Psychiatry
8 Rehab Medicine
26 Spinal Cord
22 Surgery
37 DOM
30 Nursing Home

211 Total Health Care Center Beds



STAFFING STATISTICS

(FTE = Full-Time Employee)
3,592 Employees (FTE)
285 Physicians (FTE)
759 RNs (FTE)
2,548 Other (FTE)



ADMISSIONS

6,123 Acute
107 Domiciliary
9 CLC
6,239 Total Admissions



PATIENT BED DAYS

33,206 Inpatient
9,155 Extended Care
9,719 Domiciliary
52,080 Total Bed Days

2021 Financial Report and Statistics continued



AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY (DAYS)

- 96** Domiciliary
- 4** Acute
(only includes surgery and medicine)



**UNIQUE
PATIENTS**
99,727



**WOMEN
VETERANS
TREATED**
11,856



MY HEALTHEVET FY21

- 66,425** Registered users
- 66,425** Secure messages received



OUTPATIENT VISITS

5,665	Alamosa VA Clinic
27,781	Aurora VA Clinic
1,815	Burlington VA Clinic
13,091	Denver VA Clinic:
70,973	Golden VA Clinic:
657	IDES
46,825	Jewell VA Clinic
3,463	La Junta VA Clinic
2,313	Lamar VA Clinic
204,864	PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom VA Clinic
59,104	PFC James Dunn VA Clinic
643,263	Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center
1,310	Salida VA Clinic
1,100,707 Total Outpatient Visits	



TELEHEALTH MEDICINE

- 123,989** Individual instances of care
- 27,993** Veterans using Telehealth



**VETERAN POPULATION IN
CATCHMENT AREA**
(ESTIMATED)
300,724



Accreditation & Certification

- American Association of Blood Banks (AABB)
- American Board of Physical Therapy Residency and Fellowship Education (ABPTRFE) for Physical Medicine Rehabilitation Services, Orthopedic Residency
- American College of Radiology (ACR)
- American Psychological Association (APA) for Behavioral Health (pre-doctoral internship, post-doctoral fellowship, MIRECC)
- American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) for Pharmacy Residencies (PGY1 Pharmacy Practice, PGY2 Geriatrics, PGY2 Psychiatry, PGY2 Health System Pharmacy Leadership Administration)
- Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC)
- College of American Pathologist (CAP)
- Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)
- Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) for Dental Residency
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA) accreditation for both lab and mammography
- Joint Commission (JC)
- Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)



Awards & Recognitions

Age-Friendly Health Systems Level 2 – Committed to Care Excellence

VA ECHCS's Tele-Palliative Care Clinic and Tele Dementia/ Geriatric Clinic were recognized by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement as age-friendly health systems. Age-friendly health systems have demonstrated a commitment to age-friendly, evidence-based practices.

5280 Magazine Top Doctors

Six VA ECHCS doctors were recognized as top doctors in the Denver area by 5280 Magazine. The magazine asks area doctors to nominate those that they would trust with their own care or the care of their loved ones. Larry Bourg, Liron Caplan, Brack Hattler, Edward Maa, Scott Mann, and Morgan Unruh were recognized with the honor.

VA Physical Therapist of the Year

VA ECHCS's very own Dr. Andrea Hueschen was named the 2021 Physical Therapist of the Year by VA's Physical Therapy Field Advisory Council for her exceptional contribution to the field. Dr. Hueschen was chosen for her wide-ranging accomplishments leading to improved Veteran-centric care and the advancement of Physical Therapy within VA.

Clinical Educator Visionary Award

VA ECHCS Physical Therapist Jeff Youngberg was recognized by the National Physical Therapy Field Advisory Council as the Residency Coordinator recipient of the Clinical Educator Visionary Award. Each year recipients are recognized for their significant contributions to advancing physical therapy clinical education. Jeff was recognized for his efforts to build an education culture within VHA Physical Therapy.

HeRO Award

Dr. Yamel Herrera was awarded the National HeRO Award for her reluctance to simplify a local problem she identified. She demonstrated the High Reliability Organization (HRO) principle of Reluctance to Simplify when assigned the task to investigate a problem with an oral anticoagulant dosing schedule. Instead of stopping with the one assigned case, her follow-through locally and at the national level identified an error in an algorithm for incorrect frequency of dosing.

DAV Jesse Brown Youth Memorial Scholarship

Youth volunteer Anit Tyagi was recognized for his outstanding service with the emergency medical team at VA ECHCS. He was selected as one of eight individuals across the country for the national DAV Jesse Brown Youth Memorial Scholarship.



✓ Accomplishments

✓
Veteran homelessness in the Denver metro area declined by 15% in 2021. This is the result of a collaborative care model between VA social work, city government and local non-profits.

✓
VA ECHCS was selected to host VET-HOME, a national program providing guidance and expertise to facility-level environmental health teams providing care for Veterans eligible for registry coverage.

✓
ECHCS redesigned our critical care unit and services, opening a step-down inpatient unit that provides quality care between the critical care level and medical-surgical level to give Veterans the level of care that is best for them.

✓
VA ECHCS implemented the VA National Tele-stroke Program (NTSP) in the spring of 2021, allowing us to provide stroke treatment other than intraarterial intervention to our Veteran population.



OUTPATIENT CLINICS

Two new VA outpatient clinics were approved for Colorado Springs and are expected to open in 2022.

PTSD-RRTP

Construction is ongoing on a new Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (PTSD-RRTP) with anticipated completion in Winter 2023.

MENTAL HEALTH

A new clinic was approved for Castle Rock to offer primary care and mental health services.

AURORA CLINIC

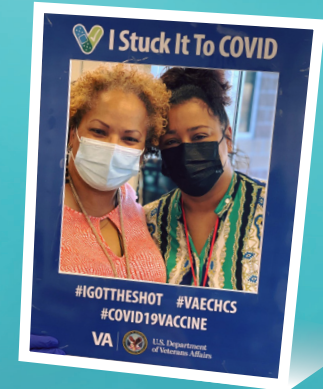
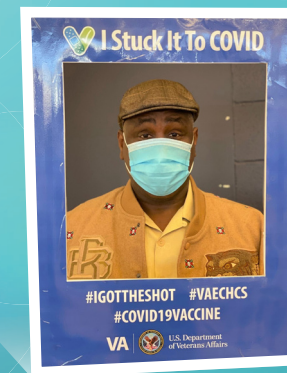
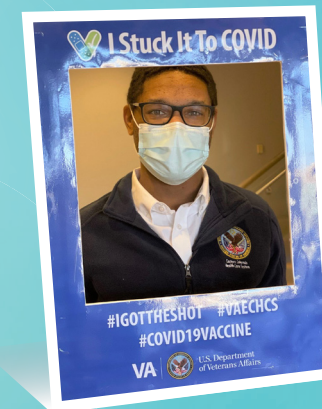
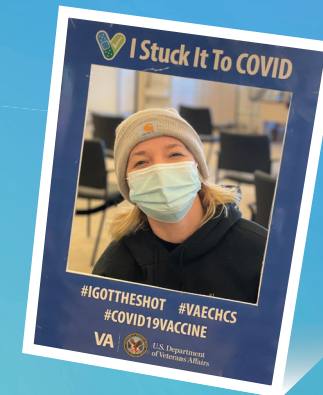
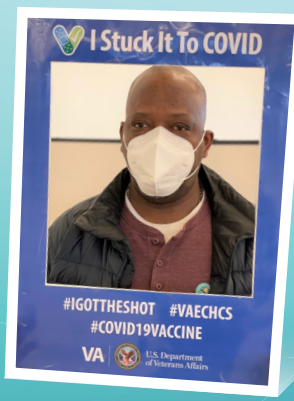
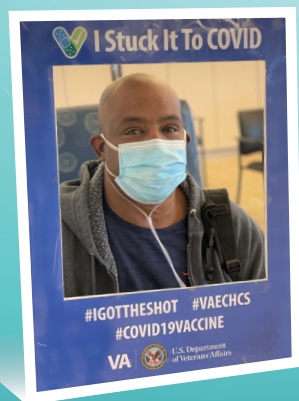
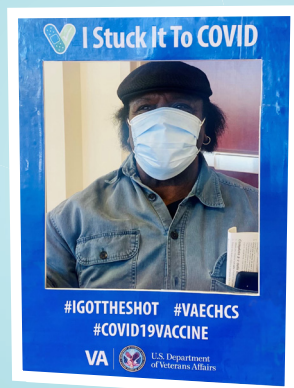
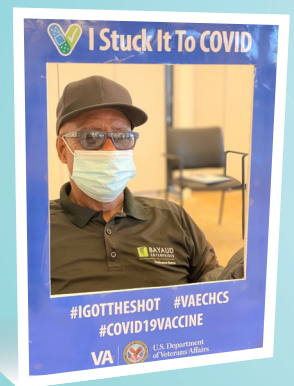
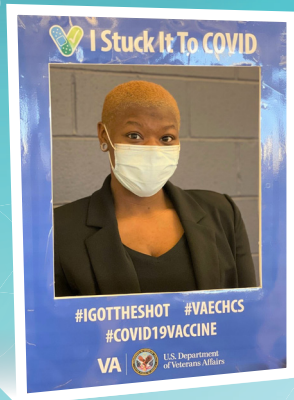
A replacement facility was approved for the Aurora VA Clinic.

PROJECTS
looking forward



COVID-19 VACCINE

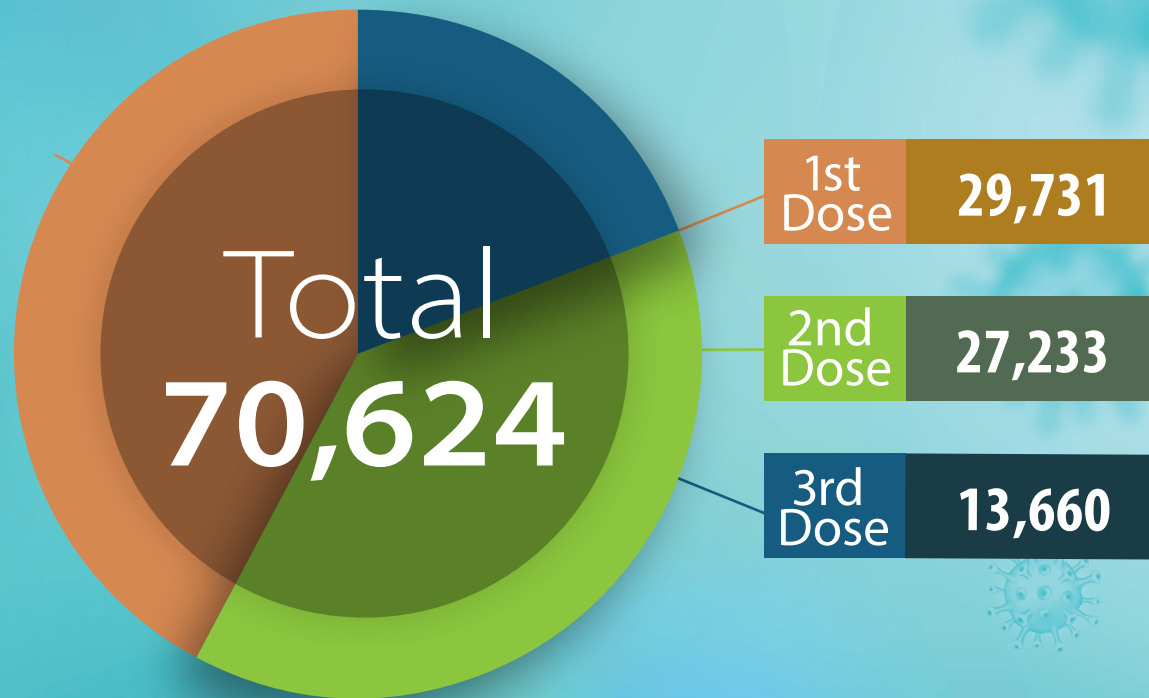
VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System was one of the first VA systems to receive the COVID 19 vaccine in December 2020. Rapid mass vaccination efforts rolled out and helped turn the tide on the pandemic. ECHCS staff rapidly set up off-site vaccination clinics in the Denver metro area in March and Colorado Springs in April 2021.



COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

by ECHCS

2021





Dr. Katrina Oyague

She Provides: Leading Women in Surgery

By Terri Rorke

Dr. Jessica Rove, cardiothoracic surgeon, knocks on Vietnam Veteran Wayne Bullock's hospital room to check on him while he sits by the window, healing up after a major surgery. "How are you feeling?"

"You are the best," he says without hesitation. "I'm recovering quite well... That's a testament to you and your team."

Rove takes a seat to spend some time with her patient since surgery is more than repairing people's bodies—it's about trusting relationships. She listens intently to the Veteran as he shares vivid memories of his service and doesn't leave without shaking his hand, telling him "This has been a true honor."

As one of 13 women surgeons at VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (ECHCS), Rove and all her counterparts provide Veterans with comprehensive, high-quality care. These women make up 22 percent of all ECHCS surgeons, collectively providing care across 10 specialties for almost anything a patient would need from head to toe: Neurology, Ophthalmology, Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT), Cardiothoracic, Vascular, Orthopedic (Hand), Breast, Gynecologic, Podiatry and General

Surgery. As healers, teachers and leaders in their fields of practice, teamwork drives every role they live and work each day.

'It takes a village,' said Dr. Rajshri Bolson, who specializes in orthopedic hand surgery. By 11 a.m. on March 10, she's already scrubbing in to perform her second surgery of the day to remove a metal plate from a patient's wrist post-fracture injury. Bolson splits her time between the clinic and administrative duties as Assistant Chief of Surgery for ECHCS—a system with just over 138,000 enrolled Veterans. Between tending to busy clinical practice, she's mentoring medical trainees, studying the latest research and leading the surgery department into the future with a constant drive to expand patient access and services.

While also giving credit to collegial and home support, Bolson—a wife and mother of two—recognizes the balance she and her colleagues alike must carry through daily, demanding schedules.

"As physicians, there is a lot required of us, and it takes a certain kind of person who can juggle it all, remain focused on day-to-day priorities and keep the patients' needs first and

foremost,” said Bolson who’s been in practice 10 years now. “I’ve been very much inspired by people I have met along the way—both female and male.”

Bolson said she was first drawn to her chosen specialty because she likes to solve problems, to work with her hands and to have a direct effect on “restoring function” and quality of life for patients. In hand surgery, the goal is very much to help patients return to their job, hobbies, and activities of daily living so they literally and figuratively can feed themselves and their loved ones.

According to a 2019 joint report by the American Medical Association and Association of American Medical Colleges, male doctors dominated orthopedic surgery (85 percent), neurological surgery (82 percent) and thoracic surgery (78 percent)—all specialties represented by ECHCS women surgeons.

Despite this data and the historical challenges women have faced, surgeons like Bolson continue to forge through a traditionally male-dominated field while paving the way for others.

“Certainly, I have benefited from the exceptionally hard work women in medicine have done before me, and more work is still needed,” Breast Surgeon Katrina Oyague said.

Oyague talked about how the surgical process is “a very unique relationship” that starts with establishing rapport and trust at the time of diagnosis and continues through the actual operation and finally recovery and surveillance.

One and a half years into her time with ECHCS, Oyague is grateful to serve the unique needs of

women—one of the fastest growing groups in the overall Veteran population. In fact, at VA ECHCS alone, nearly 12,000 women Veterans were cared for in fiscal year 2020, an increase by 9 percent from 2018, according to VA data (1).

As this growth is anticipated to continue, Oyague hopes women Veterans seek VA care for specialty services that are expected to also expand in order to meet women’s specific needs.

Similar to Oyague, Rove wants all Veterans, to include women, to know they can go to VA for care like cardiothoracic surgery. Out of the 200 cardiothoracic cases she’s performed since August 2018, Rove said only two of them were women Veterans—despite the prevalence of cardiac disease found in the general population.

While it will require continued education and outreach to help Veterans—of all gender identities—to understand what services may be available to them, Dr. Brook McConnell, ENT Surgeon, said she’s personally glad Veterans have VA for “equitable, evidence-based care regardless of their socioeconomic status, insurance status or location of health care delivery.”

When McConnell looks back at her six years and counting with VA, she said what stands out most is being able to work in a daily practice of “actually doing something meaningful and real.”

After all, VA is here to serve all who have served.



Dr. Rajshri Bolson

Blind Veteran finds recovery on the slopes

By Terri Rorke

"I didn't cry about it until one of these events," said Marine Veteran Zachary Tidwell on a break before his next ski-bike ride on Eldora mountain.

Almost two years from the day when he lost his sight and became deaf in one ear, Tidwell was part of a small group of Veterans participating in the March 2021 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic event hosted by Ignite Adaptive Sports in Nederland, Colorado. With the previous two events canceled due to the pandemic, teams from VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System's (VA ECHCS) Recreation Therapy and Ignite Adaptive Sports found a way to hold a mini event for local Veterans this year.

Spending time on the slopes was something Tidwell had enjoyed before he became a suicide survivor in March 2019. At a time when he was experiencing major depression and feeling isolated, he made the decision to shoot himself in the face. He said suicide felt like the only option because he was not talking to anyone about what he was going through.

Tidwell has no recollection of what happened after he decided to pull the trigger, but only that he woke up in a hospital surrounded by people ready to support him in his recovery. Soon after he got home, Tidwell connected with VA ECHCS' Recreation Therapist Jessica Conyers who introduced him to the many adaptive sports opportunities available to Veterans with physical disabilities at no cost. Conyers works closely with enrolled Veterans to find ways for them to re-engage in a past leisure activity or try a new sport post injury or disability.



Tidwell credits adaptive sports as contributing greatly to his recovery because he gets to be active and connect with other Veterans who can relate to his disabilities and military experience. He calls these events the "the tip of the iceberg" for Veterans like him. A place of non-judgement where "no one walks around you on eggshells anymore" and "you get that camaraderie fix that you don't get anywhere else."

Whether it's adaptive skiing, whitewater rafting or rock-climbing, Conyers said, "one of my favorite parts of these events is seeing friendships forged that continue into Veterans' day-to-day lives."

"During the time of the pandemic, social isolation has been a problem, and it is nice to provide Veterans with an opportunity to safely socially engage in the great outdoors while participating in positive leisure time pursuits," she added.

Spending time on the slopes was something Tidwell had enjoyed before he became a suicide survivor in March 2019. The ski-bike has become his favorite adaptive sport.

Sharing his story as a suicide survivor is something Tidwell doesn't mind doing. "Sometimes people get weird about it, but I think people need to hear it because people don't talk about it enough." He also encourages other Veterans to speak up about their experiences—even when it feels uncomfortable.

As Tidwell earns his degree in Clinical Psychology from CU Denver, he wants others to recognize their ability to get help. "You owe it to yourself and those around you to work on it. There's a light at the end of the tunnel, and it will get better."

Marine Veteran Zachary Tidwell says adaptive sports has played a major role in his recovery. "Having all these things like rock climbing, whitewater rafting, kayaking and this Winter Sports Clinic has been huge. Now I'm back in college, taking a full course load. I have my own house now. Without having this stuff, I think I'd be in a rut still."



College student awarded \$7,500 scholarship for VA voluntary service

By Terri Rorke

Hard work has earned 20-year-old Youth Volunteer Anit Tyagi a \$7,500 scholarship for his ongoing dedication to serving Veterans with the emergency medical team at VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (ECHCS).

For seven years now, Tyagi has dedicated his free time in the Emergency Department and has accrued more than 1,027 hours of volunteer work to date. He was selected as one of eight individuals across the country for the annual DAV Jesse Brown Youth Memorial Scholarship. DAV honors youth volunteers who demonstrate outstanding dedication and service to America's Veterans. Awardees can use the money toward any accredited institution of higher learning.

Currently a junior at the University of Denver, Tyagi is a pre-med student who has already built ample experience in the medical field through his volunteer service. Ever since Tyagi was a high school freshman, he's been transporting patients to and from Radiology, cleaning and preparing rooms, restocking linens and sheets, training new volunteers and, most importantly, keeping Veterans company.

"Serving those who have served our great nation is humbling and I continuously experience satisfaction of putting a smile on a Veteran in a stressful, unplanned visit by listening to their stories and learning life lessons," Tyagi said. "Over the years, my involvement at the VA has shown how significant attending to a patient's emotional needs has on their health outcomes."

With the most hours accrued out of any current ECHCS youth volunteer, Tyagi was nominated by the ECHCS Voluntary Services team. Fittingly, the team was notified about Tyagi's award during National Volunteer Week, celebrated April 18-24, 2021. The week is a chance to thank those who donate their time, talents and resources to support VA in its mission to care for Veterans.

ECHCS Voluntary Specialist Jack Fletcher chose to nominate Tyagi due to his years of dedication.

"I've watched him develop from a reserved high school student into a mature college young adult. Most student volunteers move on to other endeavors when they graduate high school. He is a remarkable young man."

Tyagi said his time volunteering at VA has taught him more lessons than he could have ever imagined.

This honor is humbling and reaffirms my desire to give back to those who have already given us so much. I am proud to call myself a VA hospital volunteer.



Pre-med student Anit Tyagi (center) was awarded a \$7,500 scholarship for his 1,000+ hours of dedicated volunteer service for the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System's Emergency Department. Voluntary Specialist Jack Fletcher (far left) nominated Tyagi for the annual DAV Jesse Brown Youth Memorial Scholarship. Also pictured is Emergency Medicine Chief Dr. Javier Perez (right) and Emergency Medicine RN Mark Phillips (far right).



Deborah Yagmin of the Zebulon Pike Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, delivers 12 care baskets to Keith Anderson, VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System volunteer coordinator, March 25 at the PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom VA Clinic in Colorado Springs. Veterans experiencing homelessness received care baskets as they got assistance through the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program. The baskets held nonperishable food, blankets, toiletries and other personal items, as well as "thank you" cards. Zebulon Pike Chapter members also provided \$250 for bus passes to help the Veterans get to appointments at the clinic.



"We see a variety of Veterans with unique needs due to a myriad of injuries and disorders, and 3D printing is an avenue to fabricate custom solutions when other off-the-shelf products aren't working." Clinical Rehabilitation Engineer Kaila Grenier uses 3D printing to help meet Veterans' unique needs.



Mike and Marsha Gallardo drop off a donation of food and household goods provided by the Longmont Elks to the Fisher House.



A VA/DoD strategic vision session brought health care leaders from U.S. Army Fort Carson, the U.S. Air Force Academy, Peterson Air Force Base and Buckley Air Force Base together to seek ways to share health care resources, training platforms and access to care at military treatment facilities for Southern Colorado Veterans.



Dr. Stone visited Rocky Mountain Regional VAMC in April 2021. He talked with our teams about daily operations and learned about the many innovative measures we've taken throughout the pandemic. He even gave Army Veteran Christopher Fisher his second vaccine.



Veterans were loving the fresh powder at Eldora Mountain at the downhill ski event for the annual National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. Due to concerns about the pandemic, RMR recreational therapists held a mini-event so ECHCS athletes could safely enjoy the activity they'd been training for all year.



Women Veterans entered a drive-through baby shower Sept. 10 at PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom VA Clinic in Colorado Springs. Veterans from across Southern Colorado joined the celebration, supported by Daughters of American Revolution, Soldiers' Angels, American Red Cross, Disabled American Veterans, American Legion Auxiliary and Colorado Elks Association.

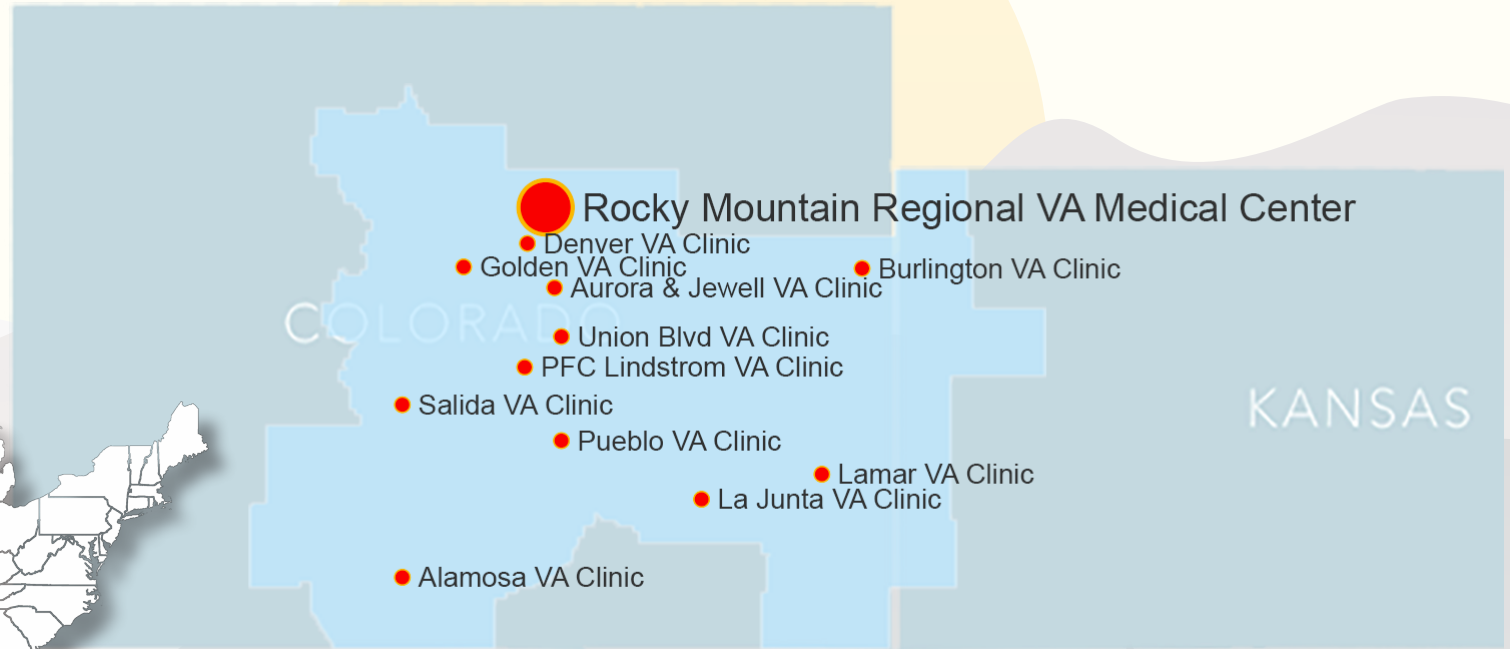
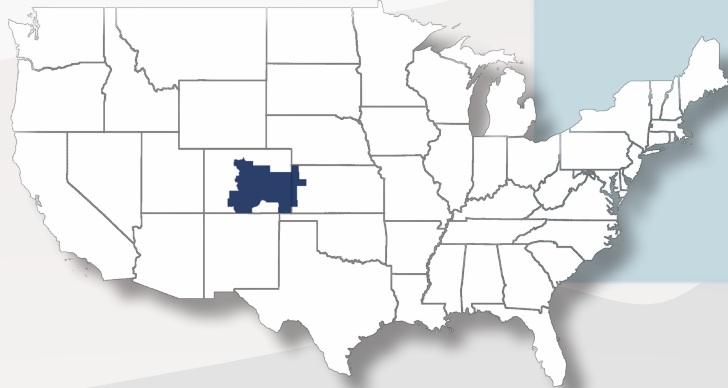
CELEBRATING PEOPLE



Especially through the last 16 months of the pandemic, we've seen our team of nearly 900 nursing and innovator in our Veteran patients' lives when a family could not be at the bedside.



Eastern Colorado Health Care System



1700 North Wheeling Street, Aurora, CO 80045



303-399-8020



www.denver.va.gov